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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Imperial Thought and Practice in the Politics of Great Powers of the 19th and 20th centuries

The Russian, the Soviet-Russian
and the Post Soviet Russian State

ABSTRACT

Modern and Contemporary World History Doctoral Program

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I. Background to the research

My final paper for my university degree in 1986 involved a general critique, including its placement in history, of Nikolay Yakovlevich Danilevsky's book entitled *Russia and Europe*. Between 1986 and 1989 I did further postgraduate research on a Hungarian Academy of Sciences postgraduate scientific scholarship, which included a research sojourn of several months in Moscow. In 1990 I participated in a summer university course in one of the most significant Slavic research centers in the United States, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Illinois. Since 1990 I have been teaching at the Department of Modern and Contemporary World History at the Faculty of Arts of the Eötvös Loránd University, in Budapest, Hungary where in the fall of 1992 I defended my doctoral thesis entitled „*A reflection of the politics of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the Russian press in the second half of the 19th century*”. I published my research on this subject in several articles in newspapers and periodicals, and later in 1993 in my book entitled „*From Byzantium to Byzantium. Episodes from the history of Russian Pan-Slavism*. Studies I have written from 2000 have been published primarily in the department's journal, in addition to the Hungarian periodicals: *Pro Minoritate*, the *Külügyi Szemle* (Foreign Policy Review), and the *Közép-Európai Közlemények* (Central European Bulletins). It was at this time that I began to concentrate intensively on 20th century Russian history as the war in Yugoslavia and the expansion of NATO following the collapse of the Soviet Union produced interesting reactions. Following the political transition older memoirs and earlier works published earlier abroad by émigrés were reissued in Russia, in addition important new works and monographs have come out. Utilizing these I was able to expand the materials used for my book in 1993 by almost three times and then republished the book in 2007 with the following, titled: *From Byzantium to Byzantium, Russian Imperial Thought*.

At the graduate school of history of the ELTE Faculty of Arts with choosing the thesis of „*Imperial Thought and Practice in the 19th and 20th century Politics of the Great Powers*” I became more actively involved in the educational programs of the university. In 2008 I did research in Moscow for three weeks, mainly at the Slavic Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, at the Library of History and at the archives of the Gorbachev Foundation. In 2009 I took part in international conferences in Warsaw and Sofia, and also in a summer university course in Hannover, where I held a presentation in English and Russian. In 2010 a study of mine was published in Russian in a periodical of the University of Stavropol, Russia, and in German in a 2011 issue of the *Prague Papers* periodical. A version of my book entitled *From Byzantium to Byzantium* supplemented with Russian history between 2007 and 2010 was published in Estonian by the Estonian book publisher Ajakirjade Kirjastus in 2012 with the title „*Bütsantsist Bütsantsini. Suurvene mõttelaadi olemus*” in greater detail than the original Hungarian.

II. The selection of the subject matter for the thesis, the purpose of the research and the timeline

There is no generally accepted conventional definition for imperialism, therefore the dissertation examines the new approaches in addition to the earlier ones and ascertains, that the imperialism evolving in the latter third and fourth part of the 19th century is a new type of imperialism, which, after the turn of the century, was analyzed in detail by Austro-Marxist thinkers and by Lenin following the non-Marxist Hobson. The virtue of these analyses was that they recognized the fact that this new type of imperialist program was different in its essence, from all the former “*traditional*” types of imperialism. And even if the concrete prognosis by the representatives of this school proved to be flawed in a number of correlations, on the whole it is a suitable model for exploring and analyzing the various expansionistic endeavours of the great or superpowers.

The anti-imperialistic ideology considered classic, and one capable of destroying imperialism is that of nationalism, the role of which was discovered in the second half of the 20th century to be far more significant, than many, including the Marxists of the 19th century, had thought. In the period following 1945 in the course of the intensive headway gained by the colonial movements for independence the various versions of nationalism, one could say for the most part deviating from the classical European nationalism, also clearly attested to the particular vitality of this concept, which has spawned a significant amount of literature in the past three decades, in part due to the transformation of formerly so-called “*Eastern Europe*”. Furthermore the relation between nationalism and imperialism, imperial ideology and the program and structure of national identity is particularly exciting not only in the case of the oppressed, but also concerning the ruling nationalities. The 20th century was the century of the fading of the empires, and when I began in 1986 to research the 19th century history of Russian and the Habsburg Empire one did not yet know that one of the most significant empires of that century, the Soviet Union, also a superpower, would soon collapse. We were witness to the Soviet state becoming lame towards the end of perestroika, to the chronic decline in Russian production beginning from 1990, at the time of a constant fall in the GDP for a decade to come it still remained uncertain as to whether or not the breaking up of the former empire would end at the borders of the nucleus country of Russia. Following Yeltsin’s particular – the literal shoot-up of the Russian parliament – form of democracy Putin’s soft

authoritarianism introduced a kind of politics into the political arena about which we are now able to form an established opinion.

Compared to post-1905 Russia the Soviet Union, even given that it was at the beginning the antithesis of the Czarist state, as a part of the international system it defined its foreign policy accordingly. Its geopolitical circumstances, in addition to, as a consequence of its state structure following 1945 (with the United States of America in being significantly different from the traditional imperialist great powers), it was able to rise to the status of a superpower by the end of the Second World War. A status which, along with massive ground forces, was crowned with the testing of its own atom bomb in 1949. The problem of imperialism in the case of the two superpowers is a thought-provoking question for, in addition to the fact that both function as power organizing centers of the planet, in confrontation with the endeavours of other, traditional colonial powers they behaved not only as imperial organizers but also at the same time, precisely for that reason, as anti-imperialist powers. Between the two, the case of the Soviet Union is more compelling because although it came about as a negation of the past at the time of its formation, in contrast to the United States, taking into consideration Russia's traditions it was an empire from the time of Ivan the Terrible, i.e. from the middle ages, when America as a country did not even exist. Furthermore, when the Soviet Union was expressly rejecting Russian imperialism it was at the same time realizing a kind of dictatorship even the czars could have never dreamt of. Its multinational nature, the development of the Soviet state, first competing with the European powers, then mainly later with the Americans, then because of the softening of the Stalinist dictatorship the examination of the content of the imperialist-superpower being became interesting. In my dissertation in comparing the endeavours of czarist Russia to be considered as a new type imperialism, I compare it to the Soviet one and strive to demonstrate the phases of its development, its imperial characteristics, as well as the predominance of the marks of Russian nationalism which are both similar to, and diverge from the earlier tradition. As with the politics of the Soviet Union, which unfortunately has become part of our daily life since 1945, with the change in its state politics and finally with its collapse, we are witness to the eroding of imperialism and also to what tools are necessary both directly and indirectly to its maintenance in our, i.e. the former Eastern European, region. Furthermore we now see what tools the successor to czarist Russia and the Soviet Union, and in contrast to those predecessors, the republic form of Russia in its present form intertwined with the figure of Vladimir Putin, although far smaller, but nonetheless, employ to enforce its remaining

defining power. The placement of the three forms of the Russian state in the 20th century in relation to the other imperialist states brings us closer to a more general understanding the new type of imperialist policy, the monopolistic capitalist imperialism and perhaps the essence of nationalism (particularly taking into consideration that due to its ethnic content all three states were multinational), which came to the fore from the beginning of the 20th century. The end period of 2010 assures a distance which allows one to confirm those ascertainments made in relation to the new, republican Russia. A further dilemma is presented of course by the fact that, as I point out in my dissertation, Russian nationalism differs from the majority of European nationalisms across the globe, in that there is comparatively more “*imperialistic content*” to it. It is for this reason I felt it particularly important to present the Russian events of World War I as here it becomes clear that there are limits to the affect of imperialism and nationalism on mobilizing the masses and that in going too far with no constraints they becomes self destructive to those for whom they based their politics on this.

An important aim of the dissertation is to present the ethnic policy of the dictatorship openly defined as such by the Bolshevik leadership from the beginning, as this was of primary significance not only in the attainment of power but also in its stability and maintenance as well. Moreover this is true when the Soviet State began to steadily “Russophy” itself from the 1930's onward, and later following the Second World War to “imperialize” itself. I hope that in the dissertation I have succeeded in making clear the new use of the elements by the Soviet Union of the old Pan-slavist doctrine in contrast from their appearance in the 19th and earlier 20th century, and later from 1948 onwards their suppression into the “*background*” culture, i.e. the periphery, while addressing the specific as well as the presumable reasons for this occurrence. The “Russofication”, or process of “Russophying” in the course of the history of the multinational Soviet state became increasing stronger, but to the Russians it was if the role of the “*empire bearer*” was one that destroyed the character. Hopefully, the dissertation has been successful in clearly demonstrating on one part the literary world, and on the other part the opposition, including the various apparitions of the Russian far right between the two World Wars, mainly in the émigré community, then later from the 1960's. The Russian ‘zapadnik’ so called ‘pro-western’ movement, however, seemed more significant and influential.

These movements, seen at the time to be „*marginal*” confirm communism’s loss of ideological territory, although the revitalization of the oil boom following 1973, but following the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 rekindled the arms race that resulted in the

extreme hardening of the Soviet system both in ideology and practice. I felt it important to demonstrate how the Soviet elite reacted to the election of Ronald Reagan at the beginning of the 1980's, which at the beginning did not prove to be an adequate reaction to the American „challenge“. The election of Gorbachev in 1985, discounting the aspect of the nationalities policy did however, although Gorbachev's politics were contradictory and at times inconsistent.

Following Gorbachev's nomination to First Secretary the role of the Soviet Union as a superpower gradually eroded, which I endeavor to demonstrate with examples while at the same time not wishing to leave out the various stations of the Yeltsin-Gorbachev relationship. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yeltsin's rise to power demonstrating the country's attempts to salvage itself from a superpower to remain at least a regional great power was not an easy task either, as the circumstances surrounding the war in the Balkans and NATO expansion accompanied by a chronic shrinking of the economy resulted in a constant frustration not only for the political elite, but also for the entire population of Russia. I endeavored to follow the change in the nationalities question, referring to one of its „wild offsprings“, namely that of the Chechens. One of the secrets to Putin's success was in his promising an exit from the Chechen question he was able to produce a relative calm in the issue. The solutions to the new Russian nationality policy, in addition to the policy concerning foreign lands close to Russia, were aided by the renewed activity in the raw materials boom, which following the regulation of the oligarchs, was deliberately and determinedly used by the new Russian president. I felt it important to demonstrate the stations of this course in relation to Putin's new activities in gaining influence associated to the hydrocarbon sector (and not only in regions close to Russia, but also in western Europe as well) up until 2010, i.e. two years following his first term as prime minister and two years before his next term as president.

III. A review of the field of literature related to the research

In the subject matter on the new type of imperialism the work by Hobson in English, and books by Hilferding, Kautsky, Buharin and Lenin in Hungarian are accessible. In addition to the Hungarian version of Howe's work, works examining the 20th century history of imperialisms (Bugajski, Callinicos, Dubofsky, Furedi, Gus Hall, Ágnes Heller, Hobsbawm, Kiely, Magdoff, Mamatey, May, Perlo, Pomeroy) are useful primarily from a theoretical point of view.

The bulk of the studies on nationalism which have been published independently in Hungarian have appeared in the latter half of the decade of 2000. Here it is worth mentioning the works of Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and George Schöpflin, but there is also available an excellent selection of works published by the author pair Zoltán Bretter - Ágnes Deák in Pécs in 1995 and then a decade later by Zoltán Kántor in Budapest.

Joseph Nye's book published in 1990 from a political science point of view, aside from providing new viewpoints in how to analyse the subject matter, also supported his main themes with specific facts.

Excellent analytical works considered associated materials are those in which the authors debate with nationalism researchers taking into consideration important factual works on Russia and the Soviet Union. Examples of this are monographs by Geoffrey Hosking and Yegor Gaydar.

The works of Alexander Dugin, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, Alexander Panarin, and Natalia Narochinskaya, although they are listed amongst the analytical works, could also be listed amongst the resources as well.

The case is similar with John Stephen who retired from a professorship at the University of Hawaii, and whose book on Russian fascism is listed amongst the analytical works but is not only simply a monograph but is also an excellent compilation of resources, as with the book by Ernő Keskeny published in 2012 on Russian-Hungarian relations a decade following the political transition, as Keskeny also provides numerous archive resources.

At the beginning of the decade studies from the Hungarian *Geopolitikai*

szöveggyűjtemény (Anthology of Geopolitical studies) by mainly British and American and contemporary French geopolitical theorists provide truly new perspectives. The anthology by Aladár Urbán provides excellent examples of manifestations by politicians representing the “classical imperialism” of the United States.

I utilized on several occasions as a starting point Hans Kohn’s book written for both professionals in the field and for the public at large as well, as it is a very good comprehensive work (although it should be handled with caution as it contains clerical errors).

It was a great experience to read Henry Kissinger’s witty *Diplomacy* threaded with specific cases, in addition to Tamás Magyarics’s work published in 2000 on American foreign policy, and his following work in 2008 on the history of the United States. These offered as much exhilaration as did the works of István Majoros, in which he shares a plethora of information with his readers, for example in relation to World War I, which are not well-known, often not even to professionals in the field.

Hélène Carrère D’Encausse’s book in 2007 provides a particularly original summary of the nationalities policy of the Soviet state, and within this the Russian and Soviet methods of solutions employed with Muslims.

It is a pity that Semyon Reznik’s book originally written in 1996 on Russia’s increasingly “fascist” face was translated from the English into Hungarian by someone who had no clue to Russian history, nor did the publisher bother to search for a competent editor who could have at least edited the translations of the names into Hungarian, thereby impairing greatly the credit of this stimulating subject so much so, that in reading the work the reader constantly feels that s/he is confronted with extreme dilettantism.

Shenfield in his work published in 2001 presents a historical background going back to the 19th century to his work on the history of Russian nationalism which became popular in the 1990’s, but even more original is the monograph penned by Shnirelman, which came out in 2012, in which the new Russian paganism is summarized with great detail all the way up into the first decade of the present century.

In theories regarding Stalin’s death I referred to Muhin, whose theory regarding the Zionist doctor’s trials and the death of Stalin differs from most others, including that of Avtorkhanov. As paper shredding took place in the Soviet Union as well, as Roy Medvedev reports, whose book *Stalin and the Jewish Question* is worth noting because he examines all

the memoirs which were published in the United States up until 2004 as well as those published in the Soviet Union and in Russia at the end of the 1980's (including those by Khrushchev, his son and the son of Beria). In exploring these resources one is confronted with the limits of the subject matter as well.

I endeavoured to incorporate the elements interesting from the point of view of the subject matter from Alexei Miller's work published in 2008 on the possibilities and limits of the policy of assimilation with regard to Russian imperialism.

I also utilized one of the monographs published in 2008 by a then young participant of the perestroika opposition movement, Alexander Vladlenovich Shubin in that respect, as I also did with Alexander Bobrakov-Timoshkin's comprehensive work on Czechoslovakia offering a number of new perspectives.

In my work I had no reason not to rely further strongly on the monographs by authors referenced in my book published in 2007: Abdurrahman Avtorkhanov, Ron Asmus, Sándor Balogh, Barsenkov, Bezborodov, Brzezinski, Barna Büky, Tsimbayev, Heller and Nekrich, Lévesque, István Diószegi, András Deák, Fukuyama, Mihály Fülöp, Ignác Romsics and Gábor Vincze, in addition to our university's World History textbook of 2006 and from amongst the anthologies on the 1998 work entitled *Doktrínák és alternatívák* (Doctrines and alternatives), as with the information found therein I was able to develop my work published seven years previously into a doctoral thesis.

IV. Methods of research

In the course of my research in addition to probing the field literature I employed the methods of historical resource and document analysis.

I relied strongly as a resource on monographs which were published on the field related to imperialism following the turn of the last century, then on those newer comprehensive works published in the course of the last fifty years, which I then compared to Joseph Nye's quasi philosophical work written from a political science perspective, rich in facts and providing a number of specific examples.

Documents relating to Hungarian-Yugoslavian relations began to appear from the mid 1990's, as well as somewhat later documents concerning Hungarian-Romanian relations, among which proved particularly useful were those dealing with the 1956 Hungarian uprising. In addition a comprehensive study has been published on Russian foreign political thought and the official doctrines, and at the same time the materials of the Slavic congresses have come out in Hungarian and Russian, as well as the documents relating to the three visits of Andrey Vyshinsky.

From 2000 on, the collection of documents related to geopolitical and nationalism research, and also on the negotiations Gorbachev conducted with eastern European leaders, began to be published in Hungary. Following the political transition it was constructive to compare Jacques Lévesque's comprehensive work with those of Mart Laar, or Janusz Bugajski, as well Ron Asmus's memoirs with those written by Russians or with the summary by Ernő Keskeny outlining the position of Moscow.

In relation to 1956 I endeavoured to use the Russian version of the Yeltsin dossier which was published in the 1990's as well as the analytical works appearing in the new Russia. I contrasted these to Hungarian resources and analyses, for example the position on the Cuban crisis, where I observed that there is no final and generally accepted position, as for example I demonstrated was the case in the death toll in the Brusilov-offensive.

IV. The key results of the dissertation

The dissertation examines the predominance of the new type of imperialism coming to the fore in the last quarter of the 19th century, linked to monopolistic phase of capitalism, which developed in Europe, in the United States and in Japan mainly from the beginning of the 20th century, which has been analyzed by first the British Hobson, then the Austro-Marxist thinkers: Hilferding, Kautsky and the Soviet Bolsheviks: Bukharin and Lenin. Referring to the comprehensive works which have been published on the subject, I recognize that (although they were mistaken in specific prognoses, for instance in that they felt the main characteristic of imperialism to be the export of capital and the efforts at accumulating extra profit, from which they derived “*parasitism*” as the exclusive character of free market competition, as well as they regarded protective tariffs and protectionist policy to be characteristic in addition to the inability for self-restraint in the competition for global redistribution and therefore becoming involved in inevitable war). Kautsky with his theory of *ultra imperialism*, according to which the imperialist powers are capable of peaceful dividing up the globe in collusion, proved to be indeed a good forecast. Lenin, on the hand, opined that imperialism is ready to put the brake on technological progression, and it was precisely in that that he found his proof of parasitism. We have learned since then that he was mistaken.

Lenin, however, found capitalism as a global system effective enough to make Czarist Russian a part of it, and he found for this reason Czarism to be also imperialistic. With the definition given by Lenin in this regard one can agree, and thus we may ascertain that after 1906 the Russian Empire with a certain level of people’s representation was not only a traditional, but also a new type of imperialism. During the First World War however the czarist regime was less able than its European partners to bear the vicissitudes and therefore in the course of the war not only did Russian imperialism (Pan- or Neo Slavism) discredit itself, but Russian nationalism did as well, thus gradually giving way to the Bolsheviks who were from the outset military defeatists. The Bolsheviks then up until 1921, when the New Economic Policy was formed, amongst the circumstances of the civil war were constantly confronted with the *to be or not to be question*, and it was only following this were they able to form such a dictatorship encompassing the entire country, one even the czar could not dreamt of. Although already in 1919 they had created an institution for global revolution, i.e. the global expansion of their influence, this proved to be an illusion up until the end of the

1930's as they lacked the required strength. Right through the 1920's the Bolsheviks were occupied with the internal cohesion of the country, in which they employed class conflict in addition to their national and ethnic policy. During the course of this process it emerged that the Soviet Union was anti Russian imperialist, i.e. that it was not a traditionally new type of state, which, however, beginning from the 1930's gradually integrated the elements of 19th century Russian state nationalism. First the USSR was able at the end of the 1930's to gain territorial allowances in Europe from Nazi Germany, but following the German offense in 1941 was it able only from 1945 to form its own zone of influence in the name of Eastern Europe, where it introduced its own system as well. The Americans noticed already in 1949 that with this occupation the Russians had "*met their match*", which seemed to be confirmed by the 1953 Berlin and the Hungarian 1956 uprisings, the Prague Spring and the Polish Solidarity movement in the 1980's. During this period the Soviet Union was able to demonstrate results only in the Third World. It then turned against the traditional imperialist powers (therefore the Soviet Union can be considered also an anti-imperialist power), but these elements did not come to be profitable "*enterprises*" in a stable or economic sense. The 1979 Afghanistan intervention, although it came with far smaller military death toll than did the Vietnam War for the Americans, was a great economic burden for Moscow. True, more critical for the Soviet leadership was the recognition in the beginning of the 1980's that the Soviet Union would not be able to keep up with the arms race of Reagan's America, the economic power of which quadrupled the size of the USSR. Gorbachev's perestroika was an unusual experiment to mobilize the strength of the society, but by the end of 1989, and in 1990 it was evident that the Soviet Union even in light of its own measurable economic parameters was heading towards the brink, as from this point on for a decade from year to year there was a chronic decline in the GDP, and then at the end of 1991 the USSR disappeared from the map of the earth. The loss of territory of the one-time superpower was great, while its population shrunk to half of its former size. The 1993 president versus parliament debate, the following elections in December, the war in Yugoslavia, expansion of NATO were all factors which bore witness to the fact that Russia was unable to play a defining role in the international political arena. Taking into consideration its parameters, it was without avail that the country with Moscow as its center was 4/5th Russian, its one nationality of one million Chechens were able to keep the entire country in constant fear. One of the secrets of Vladimir Putin's 1999 success was with the state regulation of the oligarchs he introduced a politic tactic theretofore unknown in the history of Russia, and one which resembled earlier American practice. After putting the state budget in order, relying on the

country's energy sector, Putin began to buy up industry shares related to the Russian energy sector abroad. Following the 2001 attacks on the World Trade and the Pentagon, Putin broke with the former hostility towards NATO-expansion and offered an anti-terrorist cooperation to the Americans, from whom he later distanced the country following the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. While Putin was adopting the political practice one was used to seeing from the Americans, following Afghanistan, the Bush administration employed military methods in Iraq as well. These American policies were the type of politics reminiscent of the Soviet methods. Until that time, i.e. up to the year 2000 half of the budget devoted to global arms was spent by the US, but after 2001, and in particular following 2003, they managed to double even this enormous amount.

Although the Bush administration's Middle East policy did not sit well with Putin's Russia, the drastic rise in the price of oil, due to the US Iraqi invasion, and the ensuing economic political results turned out to be to the advantage of Moscow, and produced huge revenue for the Russian state budget. Even the "*colorful revolutions*": the Georgian "*Rose*", the Ukrainian "*Orange*" or the Kyrgyz "*Tulip*" Revolutions were not enough to spoil the mood of Putin and his supporters. For Moscow the most important question was that it was able to form an agreement with Kiev with regard to the future of the naval base in Sevastopol, the west then abandoned immediate expansion of NATO.

Even though Putin's Russia is far smaller than both former Czarist Russia and also the USSR, it remains the country in the world with the largest territory. The population of the Republican Russia, or as they say the Russian Federation, in contrast to both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, is more than 80% Russian, thus considering its structure it may be considered a nation-state, while the proportion of Russians in the population of the two predecessor formations of the state of Russia was only half. Today's Russia is the only great power in the world which does not rely on energy imports, furthermore Russia holds the most significant natural gas resources on earth, and is the largest gas exporter. Taking into consideration Russian policy, in contrast to the previous two Russian formations, (although it continues to assign an important role to its military force), the country's influence is wielded through buying up shares of the companies linked to the energy sector and the bank sector, as opposed to military force. This new type of influence acquisition, one could say "*imperialist*" policy is completely different from that of contemporary Russia's predecessor states. It remains to be seen whether the Russian policy with regard to Ukraine will be that of imperialism or rather those characteristic of the nation-state.

V. Literature related to the dissertation

I. Studies and Essays

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